

CHAPTER 3

BEING A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Reflection

The notion of teachers as reflective practitioners and researchers is central to the improvement of practice. When teachers reflect upon their practices, recognise their professional development needs, introduce and evaluate changes and assist others in this process, or participate in system-wide innovation and evaluation, they acknowledge the importance of lifelong learning and professional growth.

INTENDED LEARNER OUTCOMES

When you have worked through this chapter you should be able to:

- explain what it means to be a reflective practitioner, especially with respect to classroom and behaviour management
- discuss the role of mentoring in supporting reflective practices
- explain the nature and purpose of action research and identify its key features
- discuss the potential for using action research to effect positive change and development in various educational settings
- briefly explain the key concepts highlighted for this chapter.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- Starter: Gordon's slippery slide...
- Introduction
- Reflecting on classroom and behaviour management
- Being 'thoroughly' reflective
- Reflection and peer mentoring
- Reflection and action research
 - Understanding action research
 - Key features of action research
 - Enquiry and reflection
 - Localised and personal focus
 - Collaborative partnerships and 'multiple ways of knowing'
- Using action research

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STARTER: GORDON'S SLIPPERY SLIDE ...

Gordon's new Year 5 class was going from bad to worse. The kids talked incessantly and seemed to be learning very little. They appeared to show little respect for him or each other. He tried hard to get them interested in each day's lessons, but despite his lengthy preparations, good things just weren't happening. His mentor teacher had suggested some behaviour management strategies but even these seemed to have little effect. Gordon was starting to get short-tempered with his students – even the 'good kids' who usually behaved reasonably. This wasn't the career he had planned and studied so hard for ...

The school holidays had arrived to provide the opportunity for some much needed timeout. 'I really need to think about what's happening in my classroom', thought Gordon, as he sat down to contemplate the previous term and his career. What did he need to do to change things for the better? What did he need to do to get his teaching back on track? Who might he talk to about this?

Introduction

In Part 1 – The basics, we introduced the Integrated Model of Classroom Management and explained the key theories underpinning the model. These basics provide the scaffold for Part 2 – Key preventative practices. This chapter describes and explains the first of the four key preventative practices – being a reflective practitioner.

An implicit theme in Part 1 was the imperative for teachers to be creative and versatile in meeting students' complex and often demanding needs. As we examine the influence of context, past experiences, individual variations in ability and many other issues that influence why and how students behave in various ways, it becomes obvious that teachers have an enormous responsibility and challenge to plan, implement and review effective teaching and learning programs, to create positive learning environments, and to promote positive behaviours.

How do teachers become competent quality practitioners? What can they do to answer the questions – What should work? What works? What doesn't work? What should I change and develop? If a teacher, as a member of a constantly developing profession, is to be a lifelong learner, how can this continuing process of professional change and development be supported?

This chapter looks at the concept of the teacher as reflective practitioner and researcher, and as a participant in the challenging task of effecting *meaningful change and development* in their professional practices, those of their colleagues, and in the learning outcomes of their students. We discuss why teacher reflection on and research into classroom and behaviour management are so important, and look at action research as a preferred strategy for addressing some of the many professional needs of classroom teachers.

Reflecting on classroom and behaviour management

'Reflection is the process of honestly appraising your beliefs and actions' (Henley, 2006, p. 280, our emphasis). Being a reflective practitioner empowers the individual to look inward and examine

his or her beliefs and values about behaviours, particularly in the context of their philosophy of learning and teaching. Reflective teachers look for explanations for behaviours – not just for ways to make them stop.

Three reasons should compel teachers to be vigilant about their philosophy on, and practices of, classroom and behaviour management. These reasons are predicated on the concept of professional reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Kauffman, Mostert, Trent & Pullen, 2006) or 'critical reflection and analysis' (Sinclair, Munns & Woodward, 2005, p. 216) and the notion that 'research and development must become an essential work practice for teachers' (Burrow, 1994, p. 8). Professional teaching standards that are emerging in many educational systems (see, for example, Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald & Bell, 2005; NSW Institute of Teachers, 2005) highlight the importance of teacher commitment to a process of continual growth in their daily practices.

First, aspects of classroom and behaviour management continue to be of major concern to teachers, and research should be relevant to these concerns. While a great deal of attention has been paid over the past decade to effective teaching practices and classroom management (see, for example, Good & Brophy, 2000; Rogers, 2000), research suggests that teachers continue to report concerns on a variety of aspects of classroom and behaviour management and discipline (see, for example, McNally, I'anson, Whewell & Wilson, 2005; Sinclair et al., 2005, and Stephenson, Linfoot & Martin, 2000).

Early-career teachers frequently require support to develop skills in establishing a positive learning environment that promotes positive behaviours, and to design interventions to manage and improve individual students' inappropriate behaviours. This point was emphasised by Gregor Ramsey (2000) in his extensive review of New South Wales teacher education programs. This support should be needs-based and reflect the diverse and individual concerns of teachers. Zanting, Verloop and Vermut (2001) similarly emphasised the importance of individualised, professional peer support and teacher-led initiatives like mentoring. Much of the research into classroom and behaviour management draws on observations of and interviews with practising teachers, so teachers' reflections are central to this area of research.

Second, effective teaching and classroom management practices are complementary and interdependent. As we will explain in detail in Chapter 5, factors in effective teaching, such as curriculum relevance and instructional appropriateness, play an important and preventative role in classroom management. At the same time, effective and reflective classroom management sets the scene for optimal teaching and student learning experiences to occur. Effective teaching and classroom management are interdependent and should be integrated in accordance with the ecological perspective emphasised throughout this book.

Third, teacher reflection and research can help bridge the gap between current and *evidence-based best practice*. Despite the efforts of employing authorities and higher education institutions to provide professional development for teachers, many researchers and practitioners despair of the continuing gap between 'what is' and 'what could be' in many areas of education (see, for example, Abbott, Walton, Tapia & Greenwood, 1999; Vaughn, Klingner & Hughes, 2000). The development of teacher-initiated action research, especially in areas such as classroom management that permeates daily practice, is an ideal means of achieving closer links between scientific investigation and everyday classroom practice. In fact all teachers should 'seek to analyse and understand their educational practices in order to improve them' (Groundwater-Smith, 2001, p. 2).

Being 'thoroughly' reflective

No two students are the same. Indeed, no two lessons, teachers, classes, schools or school communities are the same. Teaching is a dynamic profession wherein professional reflection on what works and doesn't work and why, for any given milieu, is a key requirement for being an effective practitioner. Effective teachers need to be *thoroughly reflective*. That is, they need to reflect frequently, regularly and vigilantly (Kauffman et al., 2006). Diezmann (2005, p. 181) refers to this as being a 'scholarly teacher'.

In the broadest sense, thorough reflection should focus on: what is taught – curriculum; how curriculum is taught – pedagogy and instruction; and how student learning is assessed and reported – assessment, evaluation and reporting. Thorough reflection integrates philosophy, values, theory and practice, and is evident at the planning, implementation and review phases of the Integrated Model of Classroom Management. Furthermore, thorough reflection is essential to inform the planning, implementation and review of interventions designed to manage and improve misbehaviour that doesn't respond to the key preventative practices.

Thorough reflection, and indeed, effective teaching, should embody the qualities of the scientific approach to research, wherein actions are taken and changes are made on the basis of research-based evidence (National Centre for Learning Disabilities, 2005; Slavin, 2002). The scientific approach involves hypothesising, gathering quality evidence and analysing this evidence objectively. Indeed, any gap between current and best teaching practice and planned and actual student learning outcomes should be reflected upon, and actions taken to bring about positive change and development.

Efficacy research, conducted under controlled, contrived conditions, is of relevance, interest and value to teachers, but is often difficult to replicate and apply in less controlled classroom and school settings. *Effectiveness research*, conducted under more naturally occurring conditions, is often needed to demonstrate how efficacy research findings can be applied in classrooms and schools.

The teaching profession, though, has a history of adopting a more intuitive rather than scientific approach to understanding classroom and behaviour management (Gersten, 1999). The high profile given by government and educational institutions to the national and state quality teaching agendas, which focus on improving teachers' pedagogy, are evidence of a substantive shift towards emphasising the 'science' as well as the 'art' of teaching (see, for example, NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003, and Diezmann, 2005). The teaching profession has tended to reflect less on published efficacy and effectiveness research than other professions (Commeyras & DeGroff, 1998; Stephenson, Linfoot & Martin, 2000). In fact Commeyras and DeGroff (1998), for example, found that less than 25 per cent of the K–12 teachers surveyed were familiar with contemporary educational research, and that 60 per cent of the K–5 teachers surveyed had not read any research journals at all. Similarly, Landrum, Cook, Tankersley and Fitzgerald (2002) found that experienced teachers regarded their peers and in-service courses to be more 'accessible, useable and trustworthy' as sources of information than tertiary courses and professional journals.

This reticence to thoroughly reflect upon and embrace research-based (scientific) evidence for various practices in schools is reflected in the persistence of some 'less-than-best' practices in classrooms and schools, and the slow uptake of some best practices that have clear potential for

creating more positive learning environments and behaviours. A number of meta-analyses (see, for example, Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001; Swanson, 1999) provide compelling evidence for the positive instructional effects of reinforcement, remediation and feedback, team teaching, mastery learning, phonics instruction, individualisation, tutoring, direct instruction and formative evaluation. These best practices are used variously across the range of educational settings, but not consistently and systematically as this strong research evidence suggests. On the topics of classroom and behaviour management, an abundance of theoretical 'how to' guidebooks exist but there are far fewer theory-based 'why to' books. You are strongly encouraged to become a thoroughly reflective practitioner, to reflect on evidence- and research-based best practices, and to consider the benefits of engaging in and acting upon the findings of effectiveness research (Groundwater-Smith, 2001; McNally et al., 2005).

As noted earlier, the reflections of early-career and experienced teachers undergoing significant reviews of their classroom practices benefit from professional peer support such as mentoring. The next section describes and explains the place of peer mentoring in supporting teachers to be reflective practitioners.

Reflection and peer mentoring

As noted earlier, early-career and experienced teachers seeking to develop and improve their teaching practices often require the support of other practitioners to plan, implement and review changes (Ramsey, 2000). *Professional peer mentoring*, wherein an experienced and successful practicing teacher provides formal but negotiated support to a teaching colleague, is now a widespread best practice in teaching (and other professions). The general characteristics of successful mentoring include voluntary involvement, mutual trust, shared experiences and reciprocity, mutual goals, and an interactive and ongoing process. Mentoring by senior teachers is widely practised at the pre-service level. Sinclair et al. (2005) describe the innovative practice of 'critical friends' wherein pairs of final year teachers-in-training act as peer mentors for each other during selected shared practicum sessions.

Effective personal professional development, even if well grounded in thorough reflection, is commonly a collaborative practice, and is usually enhanced when colleagues work together on common issues (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck, 1999). Professional peer mentoring, as a collaborative practice, can be of invaluable assistance to the reflective practitioner, and is a widespread practice among experienced teachers at all levels of professional development (Jitendra, Edwards, Choutka & Treadway, 2002). Informal mentoring is also widely practised when specialist teachers provide support to classroom teachers, and when colleagues team- or co-teach.

Beginning teachers are usually assigned a mentor teacher, variously from within or outside the school staff. The mentor usually aims to support the beginning teacher in a regular, negotiated and collaborative way, to critically reflect on teaching practices and student outcomes. The mentor supports the continuing professional development of the beginning teacher. The transition from beginning teacher to accreditation as 'professionally competent' can be a challenging one. Most states and territories now have professional bodies that are assigned the authority to accredit teachers at various levels of competency – from beginning to advanced levels.

All teachers have faced the challenging task of creating a positive learning environment – particularly in their own classrooms. Personal reflection is a natural inclination and practice for all successful teachers, but without the opportunity or motivation to reflect systematically and regularly upon the complexities of teaching (and learning), professional development (and consequently learning outcomes for students) teachers will probably not realise their potential. The rich experience of sharing these personal professional reflections, particularly through mentoring partnerships with valued colleagues, will provide the necessary opportunities and enhance motivation to develop professionally. You are strongly encouraged to take the opportunity to link up with a colleague (or group of colleagues) in a peer mentoring arrangement. This should be a personally and professionally valuable and enriching experience for you and your colleagues.

Reflections are the currency of the transactions that make up the professional peer mentoring experience. Quality reflections (sometimes from memory, but better sourced from anecdotal records, daily teaching-learning program evaluations and personal reflective journal entries) facilitate and enhance best outcomes from the mentoring experience. Similarly, quality reflections are a key component of and prerequisite for quality action research. The next section describes and explains this interrelationship between reflection and action research.

Reflection and action research

Action research, like peer mentoring, is closely associated with professional reflection. An understanding of the interdependent nature and purposes of action research and reflective practice is essential for the teacher seeking to effect positive change and development in their daily work.

This section outlines the basic nature of action research, including the three key elements: enquiry and reflection; a localised and personal focus; and collaborative partnerships and 'multiple ways of knowing'.

Understanding action research

Action research, in the educational context, has been variously defined. Spedding (2005, p. 433) has suggested that action research is 'a form of staff development in which the focus of inquiry is the participant's own practice', while Gay (1992, p. 11) proposed that it is concerned essentially with finding solutions to given classroom problems in ways that are scientific and yet situation-specific.

In describing action research as a positive form of professional development, Grundy (1995) makes a strong case for involvement and improvement as its two primary elements. *Involvement* may include an individual teacher or school staff member's commitment to exploring an issue or practice that is personally or locally relevant, and it may also embrace the concepts of partnership and collaboration – which we will explain later in this chapter. *Improvement* refers to changes achieved in direct practice or in the context of practice, demonstrated, for example, in school-level acceptance of an innovative approach to class schedules.

For the purposes of this model, *action research* in educational settings is defined as a cyclical process of considered enquiry into and reflection about specific local needs-based aspects of teaching practice achieved through collaborative partnerships and 'multiple ways of knowing'.

Action research is all about improvement through critical reflection and enquiry (Archer, Holly & Kasten, 2001).

The teacher becomes a participant in the learning process through involvement in the processes of professional reflection and action research. The action research process allows groups of people to work together at class, school and community levels to meet professional development needs, to solve problems and to evaluate outcomes. A central theme of action research is that of teachers working cooperatively to effect positive change.

Like the definition of action research, its cyclic process has been variously but similarly explained. First, the reader is referred back to Figure 1.2 in Chapter 1 – the plan, implement and review process. The process of action research aligns neatly with this basic cycle. Second, the '4P' model is helpful in summarising the key steps in actually running action research. The 4Ps are Pondering, Planning, Putting in a strategy, and Pulling back to refine your initiative. Third, the cycle has been conceptualised as the four steps of identifying problems and needs, developing a plan, testing the plan and evaluating the plan. The similarities between these models are evident.

To gain a better understanding of action research you are strongly encouraged to do some follow-up reading (see Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Hopkins, 1993; or Reason & Bradbury, 2001 for comprehensive information about the phases of action research). To identify relevant areas for action research in the classroom or school setting, teachers need to examine their own reflections or those of others. Personal professional diaries and portfolios, peer discussions and professional journals are valuable sources of teacher reactions and reflections, including identifying problems and potential innovations, and evaluating progress in meeting the perceived need in context. Kenney and LaMontagne (1999) provide a useful explanation of portfolio use in pre-service teacher training.

On reflection

What opportunities for action research have you experienced in your teaching to date?

Was it a helpful process?

Key features of action research

Enquiry and reflection

The first key feature of action research is the synthesis of active *enquiry and reflection* – the deliberate provision of opportunities to take a fresh look at local-, class- or school-level needs, problems or issues, and ways of addressing these. The balance between active enquiry and reflection is very important. As Grundy (1995, p. 11) wrote:

[W]e do some reconnaissance first to decide what we are going to focus upon, we plan what we are going to do, carry out our plans, collect evidence along the way about what happened and reflect upon our evidence in order to make judgements about the improvement that occurred. On the basis of this reflection we plan the next action, act, observe and reflect.

Source: Grundy, S. (1995). *Action research as professional development*. Occasional Paper No 1, Murdoch University, WA. Innovative Links between Universities and Schools for Teacher Professional Development: A National Professional Development Project. p. 11.

BOX 3.1

ACTION RESEARCH IN THE CLASSROOM: STUDENT BEHAVIOUR AND COMMUNICATION

Consider, for example, a teacher who believes that the challenging behaviours of his students with moderate or severe disabilities are socially restrictive and inappropriate. After a series of observations by the teacher and a colleague, discussions about the resultant data and some professional reading, it becomes clear that some (although probably not all) of these behaviours can be viewed as functionally communicative. That is, the challenging behaviours may reflect the students' best efforts to get their messages across. This realisation alters drastically the way in which the teacher approaches student behaviour in the future.

Typically, the action researcher engages in a cyclic process within which the distinction between action and reflection may blur (Grundy, 1995; Hopkins, 1993). At any stage of the process, new insights, information or approaches to a situation may shift the focus. We have all experienced that 'Why didn't I think of that?' sensation when a colleague makes an informal observation that is timely and relevant. Even though it may not be directed towards us personally, this new information stimulates a change in some aspect of our practice. Boxes 3.1 and 3.2 provide examples of action research initiatives in schools.

Localised and personal focus

The second key feature of action research is a *localised and personal focus*. As noted earlier, this localised and personal focus for action research can serve as its greatest strength. While there may be various application levels for action research in school settings, for example, at the class, grade, school or school community levels (see Box 3.3 below), people's needs form the agenda for this type of research. As a general rule, the teacher (or other participant) who is committed to change and who owns a valued part of the research – as a result of collaboration and partnership in meeting needs specific to a situation – is much more likely to follow through with a process of development and change. While the involvement of other people from outside the classroom can distinguish action research from other forms of professional development, and provide richness to the work conducted, the focus remains ultimately on the challenge to effectively solve problems that are owned by personnel in the local context.

Collaborative partnerships and 'multiple ways of knowing'

The third key feature of action research is the use of *collaborative partnerships and 'multiple ways of knowing'*. Action research can provide opportunities to develop new and creative partnerships to promote educational change and improvement (Spedding, 2005). Within action research, the notion of *partnerships* refers to teachers and others working cooperatively to effect positive change. A project may be focused on intra-school cooperation between class teachers, counsellors, parents, itinerant teachers, executives and the principal, who might all work together on a student welfare issue such as those described in Boxes 3.1 and 3.2. Alternatively, a project may involve a

BOX 3.2**ACTION RESEARCH ON A SCHOOLWIDE LEVEL: STUDENT WELFARE**

Phase	Description
Develop plans	A number of the teaching staff at Bridge Primary School note informally that some of their students are arriving at school without breakfast, prompting the Student Welfare Committee to plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a series of parent education nights • a breakfast program through the school canteen.
Activate plans	Both aspects of the program are started with financial support from the school budget and the school canteen.
Observe and record	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of parents report that they have gained important information and skills from the program. • The organising committee records this feedback, noting that the program has not reached a small number of key families. • Several teachers report that their students appear more able to concentrate in class following the program, however, a number of the students who say they miss breakfast are usually late to school, and because the canteen only provides food until the assembly bell, these students are unable to participate in the program.
Reflect on the findings	In light of the observations, resolutions are made to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make the parent education sessions available at times that are negotiated personally with the families who need them • encourage parents to send students to school a little earlier in order for them to access the program (in the meantime, the students arriving late are allowed to have breakfast before coming to class).

Source: Adapted from Grundy (1995); Kemmis & McTaggart (1988).

In this example, a school staff member actively refines an innovation designed to improve the teaching and learning experiences provided for all students. The program clearly supports the school's student welfare policy and serves to bring about a considerable change in the ecology of classroom and school life.

partnership between traditionally separate stakeholders in the education field. These may include, for example, teachers, academics and administrators and personnel from health-related professions. As Grundy (1995, p. 5) noted:

[A]ction research does not send people off to engage in solitary action and reflection. It incorporates a commitment to collaborative inquiry, which means that not only is the work of individuals encouraged and supported, but the possibility for real change is allowed, as alternative interpretations of evidence are considered.

The links between collaborative partnerships, multiple ways of knowing and peer mentoring – as discussed in an earlier section – should be evident here. Action research is all about teamwork.

BOX 3.3**EXAMPLES OF FOCUS AREAS, LEVELS OF APPLICATION AND PARTICIPANTS IN ACTION RESEARCH**

Focus area	Level of application	Participants
Aspects of classroom management in promoting positive behaviour, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seating • routines • varying instructional methods 	Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class teacher • Colleague teachers • Supervisor
Managing inappropriate behaviour through planning to change student behaviour	Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class teacher • Colleague teachers • Supervisor • School counsellor • Itinerant support teacher (behaviour)
Team teaching in basic skills areas	Grade level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class teachers from across the grade • Support teachers • Supervisor/executive
Evaluating effectiveness of school-level system as part of the student welfare policy	Whole school	All teachers, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • itinerant and other support teachers • executive • principal • parents • school counsellor

Box 3.3 provides some examples of the focus areas that may be considered using action research, the level of application, and the participants who may cooperate to encourage creative processes of change and development in the school community.

What are the features of a collaborative partnership? Arthur (1994) argued that *collaboration*, in contrast to consultation, is the exchange of ideas – a two-way process of sharing, development and problem solving. The idea of a collaborative partnership places this theme of interaction within a framework of commitment to a common purpose. Using concepts discussed by Groundwater-Smith, Parker and Arthur (1994), Box 3.4 outlines some principles and potential outcomes of partnership, and suggests that collaborative partnerships hold much promise for linking personnel within and across educational systems, in the search for innovative solutions to class- and school-level needs.

Although lacking the rigour of traditional scientific methods (by virtue of its focus on situation-specific needs), action research emphasises collecting and analysing meaningful data that is appropriate and specifically relevant to the project. This data may include classroom observations

BOX 3.4**EXAMPLES OF PRINCIPLES AND POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF PARTNERSHIPS****Principles**

- Recognition of interdependence and the contribution of each party, including intercultural perspectives
- Constructive problem solving
- Commitment to change and improvement, including risk-taking
- Tolerance for ambiguity and dilemmas
- Joint responsibility for the planning, implementation and evaluation phases of research
- Presence of organisational structures and resources for enacting decisions

Potential outcomes

- Empowerment of all participants
- Creative solutions to local needs
- A sense of 'openness' to radical solutions, problems or needs
- Redefinition of the nature of the study and acceptance of individual perspectives
- Multiple ways of knowing, shared understanding, shared responsibility and shared benefits
- System-wide mechanisms for effecting and supporting change

Source: Adapted from Groundwater-Smith et al. (1994, pp. 10–11).

using behavioural codes, interviews, logs and work samples (see Grundy, 1995, for an extensive list of data sources and criteria for selecting techniques).

The use of multiple data sources to provide a richness of multiple perspectives, or multiple ways of knowing (often called 'triangulation' in the empirical literature) is an important aspect of action research. This is particularly significant in studying human behaviour, which is typically complex, multifaceted and sensitive to contextual variables. Multiple perspectives allow action researchers to check the consistency of their findings and explore new leads. For example, classroom observations may indicate that a teacher limits the distribution of questions to some individuals in the group. However, a follow-up interview or an examination of the teacher's program may indicate other reasons for this action. The teacher may, for example, be aware of individual differences in ability of students in the class. The teacher may benefit from creative support in developing ways to include those students who cannot be questioned and who are only passively involved in the lesson.

The ongoing regeneration of practice brought about by action research is such that, although changes that are made are internally valid, they are usually not able to be generalised to other situations. That is, they are meaningful in the situation in which they are applied. This objective is best achieved using what we have described as multiple ways of knowing.

Using action research

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of action research is the diversity of potential applications. Guiding questions, investigative techniques and processes of reflection can (and should) be tailored to the needs of the particular situation in which the research occurs. Cohen, Manion & Morrison

BOX 3.5**Action research study 1**

Ryan, Kay, Fitzgerald, Paquette and Smith (2001) describe the story of the parents of Kyle, a young boy who had a number of additional learning needs, who worked with his teachers to develop a program to maximise Kyle's participation and lessen the possibility of difficult behaviours. Following an action-research cycle, emphasis was placed on the parents' input, an action plan, and the careful measurement of outcomes over time. One of the most impressive aspects of this study was the potential for improving communication and consistency across home and school.

Action research study 2

Cheney (1998) described the use of an action planning and research model to support the learning experiences of primary school students with emotional or behavioural problems. The introduction of wide-ranging assessment of student needs, teaming of school staff and family members, and comparison of progress with a group of typically developing students were interesting features of this innovative study. Importantly, the targeted students were central to the planning and collaborative process. A number of data sources were utilised and, although the process was generally considered to be very time-consuming, it was well regarded and generated many positive solutions in the local school context.

Action research study 3

Anguiano (2001) described her journey as a first-year teacher when confronted with a lot of social problems in a junior primary classroom. Using a teacher journal, observational data and student surveys, Anguiano achieved important improvements in student behaviours by focusing on effective teaching practices and other preventative approaches relevant to her particular situation.

(2000) suggested that action research techniques could be applied to the study of teaching methods, learning strategies, evaluation and administrative processes, and many other domains.

It is perhaps most helpful at this point for you to consider some recent examples of action research, paying particular attention to the teamwork aspects that are integral to this approach. As you explore the educational literature (refer to journals such as *Teaching Exceptional Children* and *Preventing School Failure*), you will find an abundance of papers about the use of action-research processes in schools. Box 3.5 contains descriptions of three studies using this approach.

Summary

In this chapter we have focused on the first of the four key preventative practices within the Integrated Model of Classroom Management – being a reflective practitioner. The need for continuing and thorough reflection, ongoing professional development and lifelong learning about classroom and behaviour management should be evident. We have explained the importance of

the teacher as an active action researcher in this field, and described the key features and uses of action research in educational settings. We have emphasised the importance of teamwork and cooperation in classroom and school-based research – particularly through the strategic use of peer mentoring, and put the argument that teachers are integral to the ongoing process of change and development in education. We have noted that while it may have a number of levels of application, action research is essentially a strategy for addressing local needs and directions for development.

Focusing on preventative practices – and only using interventions when necessary – is at the heart of the Integrated Model of Classroom Management. Being a reflective practitioner – by honestly examining your beliefs and actions, and looking for explanations for behaviours rather than just for ways to make them stop – is the first of the four equally important and interrelated preventative practices in the model. You should develop your skills to be thoroughly reflective, particularly by taking advantage of the opportunities made available through peer mentoring. Furthermore, by engaging collaboratively with your colleagues and other school members in action research, specifically targeted at identified local needs, you should be able to bridge any gaps between current and evidence-based best practices in your classroom management.

The next chapter describes and explains the second of the four key preventative practices in our model – building positive relationships through effective communication. Your ability to be a reflective practitioner, and embrace the ecological perspective that guides this model, will inform and empower you to engage with this next chapter. Building positive relationships with and between members of your school community, and especially with your students, is prerequisite to creating positive learning environments. Establishing and developing effective communication between all members is the way to achieve these positive relationships.

Key concepts

- action research
- collaborative partnerships and 'multiple ways of knowing'
- effectiveness research
- efficacy research
- enquiry and reflection
- evidence-based best practice
- localised and personal focus
- meaningful change and development
- professional peer mentoring
- reflection
- thoroughly reflective

Activity 3.1

Activity 3.2

Activity 3.3

Activity 3.4

Activity 3.5

Activity 3.6

Activity 3.7

Activity 3.8

Activity 3.9

Activity 3.10

ACTIVITY 3.11

Have you been involved with any action research projects – either within teaching or elsewhere? Describe and discuss the process, outcomes and your views on this experience.

ACTIVITY 3.12

Given your practicum experience to date, discuss your experiences of mentoring. How did this experience equate to the general characteristics mentioned, and how might this experience be improved? What are your views on the critical friends strategy described by Sinclair et al., (2005) wherein pairs of final year teachers-in-training act as peer mentors for each other during selected shared practicum sessions?

Further reading

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